

DEC 58

## Refuge Moslems Convert Store into Mosque

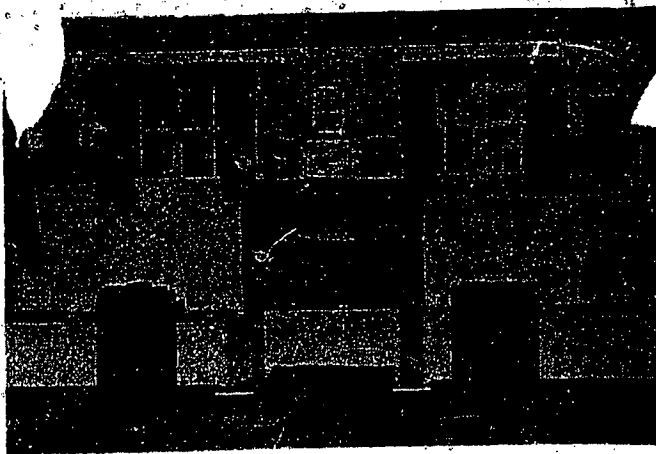
By WALTER WEGLEN  
(Photos on Page 19)  
A store on Hillman St. has been converted into a mosque by 300 refugees from Russia who make up the state's first Moslem community.  
The opening of the mosque this fall was accompanied by as little fanfare as the gradual quiet growth of the Moslem community from a handful of people in the early 1950's to its present size.  
"Growing Community"  
The community is growing constantly. Nearly every week a representative from it goes to New York to shepherd back new arrivals from overseas, settle them temporarily in Moslem homes here and find jobs for them.  
Nearly all the Moslems are members of a tribe known as

Circassians from the northern Caucasus, the rich Russian farm belt stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea.  
They were deported from their native villages by the Nazis during World War II and sent to slave labor camps in Italy and Germany. After the war they managed to resist forced repatriation to Russia.  
They have found in Paterson what they searched for through Europe and Asia for nearly ten years after the war: freedom to worship, work and live as they pleased.  
Their story is so unusual that it is surprising to find that they have absorbed into the city's life without general knowledge. It is doubtful that one person in a hundred knows of the existence

here of a thriving, growing Moslem community and mosque.  
Bathed in bloody pogroms for generations the Circassians cared little what happened to them when the Nazis deported them from Russia. Many died. When the war ended they passed themselves off as Turks or Greeks, anything to avoid being returned to Russia.  
"One of them, a tall young, unattached man named Ischerim Soobzokov, flew from Italy to Jordan and pleaded with King Abdulla to let his persecuted people settle in that country. The king agreed. From that day on Soobzokov was the tribe's leader. Today one of the guiding lights of the Moslem community here, Soobzokov modestly belittles his role. But it is obvious that with

a half-dozen languages at his command, Soobzokov had to do most of the negotiating with the foreign officials, his tribe's only counter.  
Soobzokov became a personnel officer in Amman, Jordan's capital, and his people found jobs as farmers and border guards. But the poorness of the country oppressed the industrious Circassians.  
"Came from Jordan."  
"Then came the division of Palestine, and with it a million Arab refugees poured into Jordan," Soobzokov relates. "Living conditions became worse than ever, and so did the political situation. Tensions were mounting, along with antagonism for Jews."  
(Continued on Page 19, Col. 4)

## Where Moslem Community Worships



INTERIOR OF THE Paterson Mosque, the first Moslem sanctuary in the state. The alcove at center is where the minister worships, facing a framed tapestry of Mecca. The congregation stands or sits barefooted on carpet in foreground. The framed symbols on the wall are extracts from the Koran, the Moslem Bible.

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY  
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
SOURCES METHODS EXEMPTION 3B2B  
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT  
DATE 2004 2005

## Moslems Convert Store into Mosque

(Continued from Page 1)

My people had no interest in these matters. We decided to come to America."

The Circassians contacted two of their countrymen who had fled Russia in the days of the revolution and settled in New York, Islam and Fatima Natiboff, cou-



**TSCHERIM SOOBZOKOV**  
Moslem Community Leader

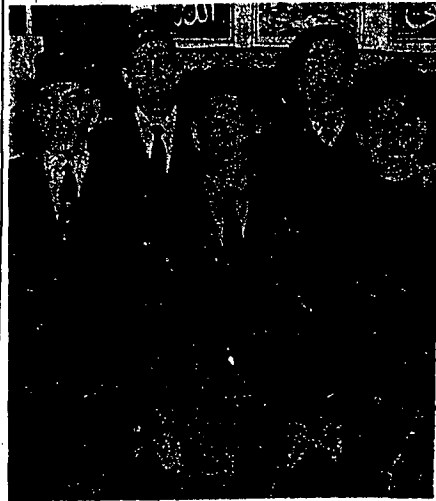
dine. The Natiboffs, with the help of the Tolstoy Foundation, obtained visas for some of the Circassians and met them at the boat upon their arrival.

By chance, this first group found jobs in Paterson and settled here. As more and more of the Circassians arrived from Jordan, they joined their tribesmen in Paterson, who helped see them through the first hard days of resettlement.

Not all of the Paterson Circassians came from Jordan. Some migrated from Germany, where they had been living in displaced person camps until their fellow-tribesmen here obtained visas for them.

Farmer in their homeland, most of them have obtained jobs in factories here. Some millowners have been more than cooperative, putting newly-arrived Circassians to work as rapidly as Soobzokov brought them. Few speak English, but they apparently make up in productivity what they lack in language.

Why Circassians, with their European appearance, are Moslems rather than Christians is a mystery even to the well-schooled Soobzokov. Never permitted by the Russians to practice their religion freely, they did not become devout in their faith until they went to Jordan.



**ELDERS OF The North Caucasian Association in America**, the guiding group for the 300 Russian Moslems who have established a community here. Left to right are Kalgary Yagutiev, Tushbi Yachiko, Ibrahim Omari, the minister of the mosque, and Qas Kusech.

While the United States has offered them their first real breath of religious freedom, economic conditions prevent them from complying with all the Mohammedan precepts. Mosque services are conducted on Sundays instead of the traditional Fridays, a weekday here.

The Circassians' first prayer hall was a room above a tavern, where the mingling odors of whiskey and beer made a mockery of the Moslem injunction against the drinking of alcoholic beverages.

### Bought Store

Soobzokov and several others went around collecting from their tribesmen until they had pledged totalling \$4,400, the amount needed to buy an empty store building at 44 Hillman St. Then they spent another \$600 for religious furnishings and the mosque of Paterson became a reality.

The mosque, which still looks like a store from the outside, is luxuriously though sparsely furnished with a Persian carpet on the floor, several framed prayers in Arabic on the walls and a beautiful framed tapestry depicting the city of Mecca. When praying, the Circassians stand or sit shoeless on the carpet, facing the picture of Mecca.

Their minister is Ibrahim Omari, who, like most of his congregation, works in a factory during the week.

Except that few speak English, most Circassians live like the people with whom they work. Some are young and have children going to public school. Many are older single men who live alone or share an apartment with friends. Many of those with families own homes or rent in the North Main St. area, where the mosque is located.

Soobzokov, who is 35, is an insurance salesman. Because his given name is hard to pronounce, his American friends call him "Tom." He is married and has four children, two boys and two girls. Half the lot was born in Jordan, the other half here.

The tall Circassian, much of whose life has been a story of persecution, marvels at the ease with which his children have become acclimated to the new country. They are popular in school, he says, and have never encountered discrimination.

He has a keen mind for pol-

itics and world affairs and mourns that his lack of citizenship prevents him from voting and taking an active part in public life. He also feels a little sorry that his people make contact with so few Americans socially.

"But perhaps that will come," he says philosophically.

The Moslem community's chief social and fraternal group is the North Caucasian Association in America, of which Tushbi Yachiko is chairman.